

## **The Press-Enterprise**

### **Region flunks traffic test**

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA: The area receives its first F. Inland drivers spend 55 hours a year stuck in jams.

By Kimberly Trone

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Inland residents are experiencing increased delays in traffic and a decline in their quality of life, according to a state-of-the-region report released Thursday.

For the first time, traffic mobility in Southern California earned a flunking grade on the annual report card from the Southern California Association of Governments, slipping from last year's mark of D-minus.

Travelers in Riverside and San Bernardino counties are spending about 55 hours a year stuck in traffic, a 70 percent increase from 1990 and the ninth highest among the nation's metropolitan regions.

Commuters in neighboring Los Angeles and Orange counties topped the nation's urban areas with an average delay of 93 hours during peak periods.

The report estimates congestion on the region's roads and highways costs about \$12 billion annually, significantly higher than any other metropolitan area. Lake Elsinore resident Robin McAlpine said she wasn't surprised traffic mobility earned a failing grade. She blames policymakers for planning inadequately for population growth and new-home construction.

McAlpine and her husband leave their home at 4:30 a.m. for work in San Clemente at the San Onofre power plant. Their 55-minute commute in the morning usually goes well. Coming home is a different story.

"It seems like they makes plans for infrastructure and growth after things happen, after hundreds of new homes are already built," McAlpine said. "Things just keep getting worse."

Regional leaders took advantage of the failing grade to pitch support for Gov. Schwarzenegger's proposed multibillion-dollar state infrastructure bond.

They also called for a lock box on money from Proposition 42, a voter-approved initiative in which state gasoline sales taxes were supposed to be spent on transportation projects.

"It is totally unacceptable that we borrow from transportation to balance our budget," said Mark Pisano, executive director of SCAG. The regional planning council is made up of six counties that collectively have 187 cities and a population of 18 million.

Job growth and public safety held on to their B grades from last year.

Riverside County saw an 11.3 percent decrease in violent crime, second only to Imperial County's 14.4 percent decline. Riverside County Sheriff Bob Doyle attributed the success to a new law-enforcement team that focuses on hot spots of violence.

Despite the most meaningful job growth since the year 2000, which was fueled in large part by a strong housing market, the financial outlook for Southern California households overall was bleak.

Southern California has the highest housing-cost burdens for owners and renters and the highest poverty rates in the country. One of every five children in Southern California lives below the federal poverty line.

"We see this report card as a challenge rather than as dismal results," said Los Angeles County Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke, emphasizing the strides in the economy and the opportunity for the region to capitalize on its position as an international gateway for trade.